

# 10. Boxer deconstructionist

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A ghost is haunting Australian politics, the ghost of Aboriginal power. Perhaps in the way that Marxism has been a 'critical factor' in the articulation of world politics, Aboriginal power has been a spectre in white Australian history. And despite all the struggles, the regular announcements of victory, assimilation, 'reform' or ten point plans, Aboriginal power persists. Marxism, too, continues to haunt the languages we use to analyse politics and history.<sup>2</sup> How does one explain the persistence, even the growth of Aboriginal power; the power it uses to unravel those often-held certainties of politics and history?

In order to attempt to answer this I shall have to avoid that language which seems to aim towards certainty and closure (history and politics) and stray into philosophy, a mode of activity that rarely engages with Aboriginal knowledges (or is indeed rarely seen as a kind of Aboriginal knowledge; you have religion, but not philosophy, why is this?<sup>3</sup> ).

My discussion will centre around a famous Kalkatungu man, who lived with the Duracks in the East Kimberley when they started their pastoral empire. 'And on the more benign stations,' says Tony Swain, 'there was room for the creative philosophic thought of people like Boxer.'<sup>4</sup> What kind of philosopher was he? Mary Durack also mentions philosophy, in a book talking a lot about Boxer, *All-about*, 1935, in which the dedication, the most significant encapsulation of the book, ends by saying: 'Yours is the gift of laughter and human kindness and true philosophy. Were you ever savages?'<sup>5</sup> .

'Were you ever savages?' is the question picked up by Tim Rowse for his significant article, his historical and political analysis of the turn-of-the century frontier in the East Kimberley, "'Were you ever savages?" Aboriginal Insiders and Pastoralists' Patronage'. Why this interrogation about savages, from Durack in 1935 and then Rowse 50 years later, when the thrust of the question is that you can no longer be considered savages? We know this from the change of tense in Durack: 'Yours *is* the gift of laughter ...' becomes '*Were* you ever ...'

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*.

<sup>3</sup> For Kierkegaard, according to Zizek, '*religion is eminently modern*: the traditional universe is ethical, while the Religious involves a radical disruption of the Old Ways – true religion is a crazy wager on the Impossible we have to make once we lose support in the tradition.' *The Ticklish Subject*, p. 115.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Swain, *A Place for Strangers*, p. 233.

<sup>5</sup> Mary and Elizabeth Durack, *All-About*.

But 50 years later Tim still asks the same question, and I will ask why again later.

Now I want to ask about that gift, that precondition for not being savages. 'Yours is the gift of laughter and human kindness and true philosophy.' Unlike Tim I want to begin with what Durack asserts in that present of 1935; *true* philosophy (and *laughter*, not many jokes in historical and political analysis, these are no laughing matter); and *kindliness*, which is of course about kinship – knowledge and kinship, kith and kin, go together in the philosophies I am speaking about. Laughter, human kindness and true philosophy are of course the opposite of savagery, as Durack implies, questioning the assumptions of her readers (just as Bruno Latour was to do in 1993, telling his European readers, 'We Have Never Been Modern'<sup>6</sup>), so my interrogation of the analysis of certainty might just have to pop the question, might your analysis not be getting a little bit savage, or at least a bit blunt, to the extent that it does *not* incorporate laughter, human kindness and true philosophy?

So I am going to tell the story of the philosophy of Boxer, an 'insider black', a 'magic', a *maban*, and how his *work* made Aboriginal power persist. I am going to re-read the available texts, which give us just about all we know about Boxer. I am going to make these texts work a little bit harder – this is deconstructive method – find the words in them which have given up and, it seems, can go no further on the road to truth. Exhausted words which fall back on our old assumptions.<sup>7</sup> Tim Rowse, for instance, knows that the arrival of the Europeans

<sup>6</sup> Latour, 1993, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass.

<sup>7</sup> Critics of deconstruction say that it is apolitical, that it is all negativity and has nothing positive to offer, that it denies the existence of reality. Keith Windschuttle, for instance, says: 'Because we are locked within a system of language, Derrida argues, we have no grounds for knowing anything that exists outside this system. "What one calls real life," according to Derrida, is itself a text. Hence it follows that all we have access to are texts. "There is nothing outside the text", he has claimed in a famous aphorism (Windschuttle, *The Killing of History*, p. 24).

Derrida would never make such arguments, and the quotations are not referenced. For a book that is supposed to take questions of history and truth seriously, it is very shortsighted and self-serving. It aims only to create a skirmish in a little academic field. However, I want to take some of the accusations on, to correct them and reveal more of the method I am using. The thrust of 'there is nothing outside of the text' *il n'y a pas d'hors texte*—better translated as 'there is no outside position on a text' is not to deny the existence of objects in the world, but to argue that a philosophical project, like deconstruction, does not consist in bringing a theory to a situation, or text, as if the theory would enlighten it, but rather to scrutinise what is being said in order to 'articulate the problematic foundations of our currently conceived political programs' (Elizabeth Wilson, *Neural Geographies*, p. 22). In other words there is no outside in the sense of a stable, overarching or common sense position from which all things can be examined for their truth values. If deconstruction works from the inside, then its aim is to question the most basic assumptions and concepts underpinning a project. To neglect them is to acquiesce to political stasis. Elizabeth Wilson states the problem for feminism:

'Feminism's complicity with patriarchy, for example, is the structure of violence that is the 'origin' of feminist politics in general. An examination of this 'origin' is neither a disinterested pursuit nor a leeching [parasitic] one; on the contrary it is the hard political work of feminism itself. Without such (self) scrutiny, that is without an examination of how this violent origin enables feminism in general, feminism may be tempted to declare itself a sanitized and sanitizing political practice' (p. 22).

on the Kimberley frontier was a massive disruption of the old way of life: 'a world in such ferment'<sup>8</sup> and, 'the unprecedented nature of the phenomena confronting Aborigines'<sup>9</sup> are phrases he uses. And before too long he divides the frontier between 'insider' station people and 'outsider' wild blackfellas – which is pretty convincing – yet he uses too quickly, for my liking, the word 'order' to describe station life: '... the universe of Kimberley Aborigines came to be divided between the pastoral *order* and its dangerous exterior'<sup>10</sup>, and, 'to be lost, as in Jack Bohemia's police tracker stories, is 'to be in a state of moral *disorder*''.<sup>11</sup> The crucial question is, whose life was more ordered? Whose law is wilder, the cattle spearkers or the blackfella-shooters (and there is evidence that the Duracks as well as their insider blacks like Boxer, were among the shooters, though almost surely not the worst of them). Old Bulla (from Kununurra) puts the same question, talking about magic: 'Who's the powerful? Who's the strongest? The white man or the blackfeller, see, out of those two?'<sup>12</sup>

Now, having posed those questions, I am not going to be in a position to answer them here and it is not my place to do so. I have simply woken up a sleepy word, 'order', which was happy to go along with the assumption that the whitefella world was taking over on this frontier, that this would be the new world order, so to speak, what Rowse calls the *Pax Durackia*, and others have called the 'golden age' in Northern frontier history:

Here is a lasting ideology of paternal responsibility – timeless compared to the shifting government philosophies of protection, assimilation, land rights and self-management ... It is this ideology, as much as Durack's books themselves, which enjoys classical status in Euro-Australian culture. An ideology as secure as this must have reason to be so. Jack Sullivan's memoirs have shown us one reason: he and his fellow stockmen

Now, this can be argued for Aboriginal political situations, and the notion of inside and outside is most relevant to the frontier as reality and as metaphor. There is indeed a founding violence in the colonial or frontier situation. Many have experienced that this violence can be perpetuated by the words used in the analysis of it, and that another kind of critical or symbolic violence has to be performed on those words to open up a space for new political conception and action. This is deconstruction. It works from the inside, it does not bring ready-made concepts from somewhere else and 'apply' them. And if we agree that there is no Aboriginal politics which is not complicit with the colonial violence which created the need for them in the first place, then there will be no pure Aboriginal position *outside* to provide a critique of what is going on *inside* Aboriginal politics. Those doing these politics are working within and continually on the symbolic violence of colonial history, where that history can never be purely a whitefella imposition, nor a pure blackfella revolution from the other side. So, for this paper, Boxer is the enigmatic figure of frontier ambivalence whose work should be able to cast some light on how we think about Aboriginal politics and power.

<sup>8</sup> Rowse, 'Were You ever Savages?' p. 93.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 88, my emphasis.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 89, my emphasis.

<sup>12</sup> Bulla, in Shaw, *Countrymen*, p. 181.

were able to expound their good fortune as subjects of the Durack's peace.<sup>13</sup>

After many thousands of years of Aboriginal reign in the Kimberley, we have a picture of a 'lasting' new peace, a 'timeless' and classical ideology installed at Argyle under the benevolent patronage of the Duracks. But what happened? Charlie Court had grander plans for the Kimberley, and in 1971 the lands around Argyle were submerged by the waters of the Ord, a veritable biblical flood. This new order hadn't lasted too long, on the scale of Kimberley history.

But yet it lives. The Duracks transformed this pastoral order into books, and *All-about* is a fine pastoral classic. Boxer, for his part, transformed it into a new cult, *Djanba*, the ceremonial boards of which are disintegrating along with the remains of the station (the homestead itself was relocated) under all that water. Whose magic is the more powerful? I can only keep asking that question, but I am an *outsider* critic, a group Rowse perceptively included. Who *were* the enemies of the Duracks' order?

From the Durack point of view there were two sets of outsiders to be dealt with: the urban critics of pastoralists' apparent enslavement of local Aborigines; and those local Aborigines who distanced themselves from the homestead's regime of rationed work and remained a danger to people and to cattle. For the Duracks and their contemporaries 'the insiders, both black and white' enjoyed an accord that neither the critics with pens nor those with spears could share.<sup>14</sup>

The critic with the pen is wild in the sense of being out of line. What would those city folk know? For instance, there is a profound accord, a loving trust, which makes Mary Durack able to write in the following way about the housekeeper who comes up from the camp to wake up the people in the homestead each morning:

Nubbadah's coming marks the beginning of the day for the white community. She pads noiselessly, from one to the other, and upon the sounder sleepers lays a firm black hand. 'Cub-a-dee!' she says, thrusts a cup and saucer into half-dazed hands and disappears.<sup>15</sup>

Do a bit more work on the text. There are two sorts of hands; 'firm black' ones and 'half-dazed' [white] ones. Each day her coming 'marks the beginning'. Who is running this show? And already on the previous page we have met Boxer for the first time, as a young boy, insisting that a boab tree be planted in the garden against the wishes of the gardener who found them

<sup>13</sup> Rowse, 'Were You ever Savages?' p. 97.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 81–2.

<sup>15</sup> Durack, *All-About*, p. 14.

hideous ungainly things; but Boxer the ten-year-old rascal, had brought it in to be planted in the garden and called after himself. Boxer thought very highly of boab-trees (particularly boab nuts), and what Boxer said, even in those days, went. 'Boxer' the boab tree is nearing its forty-fifth year.<sup>16</sup>

Where did this powerful boy come from, who could boss around the white gardener? Mary Durack tells us that he was

... from the Mt Isa area ... the eight year-old Boxer had come across from Queensland with his mother and a man called Wesley Lyttleton, then on their way to the Halls Creek goldfields. Pumpkin, so the story goes, took a fancy to the boy and acquired him in exchange for a good packhorse and a tin of jam.<sup>17</sup>

This boy grew up to be so trusted by the Duracks that he virtually ran the cattle camp, as did Jack Sullivan who followed in his footsteps and left his oral history with Bruce Shaw. As a Queenslanders, raised by another Queenslanders (Pumpkin), he had some conflict with the locals, but at the same time learned the local languages and mediated strongly between 'inside' and 'outside': 'Boxer was a man who flowed around like the wind,' said Bulla.<sup>18</sup> He was always turning up just as he was needed, the whitefella and blackfella testimonies agree on this.

Most importantly, for my argument, he was a cultural innovator. Was he happy with the 'order' the Duracks had installed, or rather the order that his peoples' cooperative effort had installed *with* the Duracks, which was only to last a little more than his lifetime? There was obviously such a huge disparity between these two ways of life that he could not help but have his intelligence challenged in making sense of it all. Not totally unlike Mary Durack writing *All-about* to make sense of it all, from her point of view. But while Mary Durack's text was sent off to the *Bulletin* to be published far away from its source ('You will never read this, for to learning you have no pretensions ...' she says in her dedication to her 'all-about' mob, 'You cannot sue us for libel'), what Boxer did was *performative*: he created a new cult, called *Djanba*, which would have been quite opaque to the Duracks (they too, had no pretensions to learning):<sup>19</sup> This *Djanba*, that Boxer created, really took off:

Old Daylight ran that *Djunba* from down near the jetty road at Wyndham. He just flew around like that , all over, like this *Mulalai* who started from that way too. *Djunba* flew in the sky, *Mulali* went on the ground.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13, the dating puts Boxer's birth date in 1880.

<sup>17</sup> Durack, *Sons in the Saddle*, p. 379.

<sup>18</sup> Bulla, in Shaw, *Countrymen*, p. 170. *Djanba* is variously spelt and appears as *Djunba* and *Tjanba*.

<sup>19</sup> 'You wanna come down see 'm corroboree to-night?' Nubbandah asks the white community. "Im properly good one, all right.' 'Different kind?' we ask sceptically, being fully acquainted with the usual somewhat monotonous procedure. (Durack, *All-About*, p. 60).

*Djunba* started from Wyndham and came this way past to Argyle right back this way to Darwin. The corroboree belonged in Queensland to those Kaukadunga, in mixed English ... They were really clever men and flew over just like the wind.<sup>20</sup>

Tim Rowse quotes the full text from Lommel, who observed the cult in the 1930s:

In the myth of *Tjanba*, some of the characteristics of this ghost are borrowed from modern culture: his house is of corrugated iron and behind it grow poisonous weeds. *Tjanba* is able to impart the hitherto unknown diseases of leprosy and syphilis by means of little sticks which have lain in those weeds overnight. Men who possess [name deleted, but incised boards thought to have circulated from the desert Aborigines] are able to infect other people. *Tjanba* hunts with a rifle and ornaments his slabs with iron tools. To distribute his slabs to men (some of his slabs are stolen, others he himself sends out) he uses aeroplanes, motor cars and steamers. When showing the slabs to fellow ghosts, he asks them for tea, sugar and bread. Following the myth, the modern cult demands exuberant feasts with tea, sugar, bread and as much beef as possible but no meat from any indigenous animal. The cult places have to be in the vicinity of farms and stations. The cult language is Pidgin-English. The cult is directed by a 'boss', the slabs are stored away by a 'clerk', the feasts are announced by a 'mailman', and order and discipline during them is maintained by some specially appointed 'pickybas' (from police-boys).<sup>21</sup>

Now Tony Swain has written about this cult, and others like it, in interesting ways. Swain's habit, when citing these Aboriginal innovations is to talk of the 'cosmic marriage' of two laws: '... having of necessity allowed White Law to impose itself on them, they have sought their salvation partially by employing its representations, but pre-eminently by conjoining it with the law of the lands and their spirits.'<sup>22</sup>

To which one has to ask, is 'salvation' what cultural innovators, even philosophers, seek? Are these two laws 'conjoined', 'married'? All of these metaphors suggest closure, the pious end of the story. But *Djanba*, like Boxer knows how to flow around, and put himself *inside* every ceremony: As Swain says:

Jack Sullivan [says] ... *Djanba* 'was a wild human' ... The multifaceted *Djanba* has a chameleon-like capacity to conceal himself within ceremonies; 'he puts himself in every corroboree; just fits himself in'.

<sup>20</sup> Bulla, in Shaw, *Countrymen*, p. 180

<sup>21</sup> Lommel, 1950, p. 23, cited in Rowse, 'Were You ever Savages?' p. 96.

<sup>22</sup> Swain, *A Place for Strangers*, pp. 238-9

His ability to appropriate perhaps reached its height when, at the request of the Catholic priest who asked that traditional songs accompany mass, Djanba entered holy communion: 'he goes through the white fellers now that Djanba'.<sup>23</sup>

Swain makes a strong case for power coming from the East, not only the colonisation by the Durack mob, but also a tradition of new cults emerging from Arnhem land. Coming on that wave Boxer seemed to have brought, from his own country around Mt Isa, a way of thinking which coupled fierce loyalty to the whites with a culture, which according to Swain, was 'more subtle and dangerous' than the millennial cult of *Mulunga*, born about the same time as Boxer, in the late 1880s, and spreading right down through the centre to South Australia. This was a millennial cult, with a compelling reason for people to participate in it. If you didn't, you would die, along with all the white people. It thus proposes a magical solution to white power, and a possible return to the way things were before. Swain argues for its historical source in the famous Kalkatungu battle of 1884 where 600 warriors died. Boxer would have been about three at the time, though we don't know if he was anywhere near there.

Now, unlike *Mulungu*, the argument goes, *Djanba*, Boxer's cult, does not promise as its outcome a return to homelands free of whites. It does three rather new things. It articulates Aboriginal power with white objects like cars and aeroplanes, giving it speed of transmission. The second is insider work, 'he puts himself in every corroboree; just fits himself in'. The third innovation opens up time by proposing a future; personal immortality in the form of stories about Boxer's resurrection after death, the introduction of the subsection system (by Boxer) and Moon stories which involve recycling of individual bodies rather than places, and possibly also the promise of equal co-existence with whites. Swain is assertive ('Time is central to the innovations of Boxer ...'<sup>24</sup>), but not entirely convincing on these questions, he lacks evidence.

Now let me consider these with a deconstructive attitude which is attentive to the persistence of Aboriginal power in the face of the opposing power of white philosophies. Take an innovative object for instance, as described by Tonkinson in Swain:

Crayon drawings made by Aborigines of *badundjari* [dream-spirits] sometimes resemble aircraft, and vehicles said to be used by *badundjari* to transport others are depicted as aeroplanes, complete with wings, tail, windows and headlights, but with sacred boards, not propellers or jets, supplying the power source.

Swain concludes:

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 236

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 240.

In other words, these spirit aircraft were propelled to their lands by icons manifesting the potentiality of place. Beyond dreams filled with invading places are visions of place-planes offering a ride home.<sup>25</sup>

This innovation, which articulates Aboriginal power with white objects of power, speed and travel, has a poetic resonance in the very shape of the propeller boards and the sound they make. But we all know those guys must be quite wrong to think *that* is what gives these machines power, it is of course the engines, the petrol ... unless we make one little shift, which is to humanise the object, not fetishise its technology. The plane articulates with the bodies which use it, the seats and controls are made for bodies to occupy, it cannot function without them. The object has emerged out of human invention, out of bird-dreams, and how far is it from them in the ways we enjoy it? The power is ultimately human. Whether the humanism is relevant or not, understanding the plane from this perspective makes the Aboriginal version no longer primitive. It sees it from what we might call Aboriginal connectivist (relation-based) thinking, rather than thinking in terms of discrete objects and beings. We can ask once again, with Bulla: 'Who's the powerful? Who's the strongest?' – not to decide that contest, but to deconstruct notions of strength, and explain the paradoxical power of weakness.

Tim Rowse supports his history of the stability of insider station life, *opposed to* the 'landscape of terror'<sup>26</sup> on the outside, with narratives in the 'police tracker genre', as documented by Bill McGregor. In these narratives, understandably because told by a police tracker, there is no safe return for outlaws, people would generally die out there.

The safe return of the lost is a non-event in Bohemia's narratives because, in the moral order that gave rise to police tracker narrative, people had no business being out of place.<sup>27</sup>

But there is another genre which contradicts this one, one which suggests to me that people like Boxer who had no terror of the outside,<sup>28</sup> might just have soon been *inside on the outside*, so to speak, flowing around, getting in with the locals. So when Boxer is put in gaol, he can escape at will with his magic:

They put the poor buggler in the jail house in Wyndham, locked him in. He'd done nothing. They just put him in the jail, that's all, and he came

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>26</sup> Rowse, 'Were You ever Savages?' p. 82.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, 'Were You ever Savages?' p. 89.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Durack writes that Boxer was usually M. P. Durack's travelling companion because, 'unlike the Kimberley-born Aborigines, he did not mind how far afield he rode, or among what potentially hostile tribespeople. It could hardly be said that he was without fear, or had no reason for it, but he prided himself on being alert to every native wile and strategy, sleeping at all times 'with one eye open' and a hand on the revolver on his belt.' (*Sons in the Saddle*, p. 63.)



out and went away. After a while they saw Boxer walking round in the pub out there. 'Oh blimey', the policeman said, 'There Boxer outside walkin around.' 'Oh well', old M. P. Durack said to him, 'You can getim and putim in jail if you wantim.' They went up. The policeman caught him and took him back and locked him up in the jail house. As soon as they walked away, two or three hours after, they saw Boxer again walking about outside. 'Ah well, give him another go.' The third time they tried again and saw Boxer sitting down in the store in a chair, the old bastard. They didn't know what to do. The policeman couldn't do anything.<sup>29</sup>

This escape narrative has exactly the same structure as Paddy Roe's 'Mirdinan', even down to the three-part structure.<sup>30</sup> Mirdinan goes further afield, down to Fremantle, to dramatically escape from the noose as he is hanged, transforming into an eaglehawk and flying back to his country. Boxer's magic persona shares some of these features of freedom of movement; self transformation (changing into an emu, also in Paddy Roe's stories); letting his guts spill out and putting them back; creating songs and stories, all in explicit assertion of blackfella power.<sup>31</sup> This, I would argue is inside work on the representations of both black and white culture. It is less the mediation of the clever man, creating a syncretic culture by going backwards and forwards, and it is certainly not the culture of a radical outside, as in the Mulunga cult (or Pigeon's guerilla warfare in the central Kimberley) which would bring whitefella rule to an end and take things back to the old ways.

Boxer's infiltration and conceptual change of both laws is open-ended. As Swain says, it incorporates time, perhaps for the first time, in a significant way in Kimberley cultures. We don't know what happened to Boxer in the end. Unlike Paddy Roe's Mirdinan, who was defeated by a whitefella power, alcohol, and dumped in the deep water off Broome (another source of ceremonial power according to Swain), Boxer, in a way, still lives. One source says he was 'in our

<sup>29</sup> Bulla, in Shaw, *Countrymen*, p. 181–2 (see note in Shaw).

<sup>30</sup> Paddy Roe, 'Mirdinan', in *Gularabulu*, pp. 1–17.

<sup>31</sup> He'd open his guts just to show a trick and they'd all go back the same way again, with all the guts sewed up again ... That fella was wide open like when you kill a killer. You could see his guts hanging right down to the ground, his heart, liver, and everything (*Countrymen*, pp. 180-81).

(...)

At Ivanhoe they'd say, 'Ah, look out look out, emu comin through the ration camp', the old people's camp, 'sendim up dog'. There was no more emu, only Boxer. The next minute when they went out along a little bit you saw him. Well, where's that emu gone?

(...)

Same as the white man doctor the blackfellers are just the same. Who's the powerful? Who's the strongest? The white man or the blackfeller, see, out of those two? To tell the truth the white man doctor didn't know what to say. I saw this done, you know, and I knew that. That's fair dinkum (*Countrymen*, p. 181).

cemetery down at Argyle.<sup>32</sup> Jack Sullivan says he was buried in Darwin, but then years later seen in a pub in Hughenden, North Queensland, by a white station manager, who returned to Darwin to find his grave split open.<sup>33</sup> 'I don't think magic people die,' concludes Bulla.<sup>34</sup>

And it's my turn to conclude. In my experiment of inflecting deconstructive method with the changing stories of Aboriginal power, leading up to the radical challenge to historiography posed by Boxer, I am left with further questions: What is the most appropriate method for understanding that frontier history? As Tim Rowse says, 'The most difficult part of frontier history for Europeans is the history of Aboriginal understanding: how did they make sense of the invaders ... ?'<sup>35</sup>

My feeling is that we have to go further than the opposition of inside and outside, that the method will also involve simultaneous inquiry of how the invaders understood the Aborigines. I also think that it is not just a question of getting the words right, for if the Boxer story has taught us anything, it is about the importance of performance. The stations and the country of the East Kimberley were the *theatre* of his life as 'a magic'. I haven't been able to reproduce any of that drama in my poor performance today (maybe I should make an excuse, like old Bulla: 'I could dance it but my knee's bugged'<sup>36</sup>). But that is the question: what forces does history writing mobilise which reach truths other than, or as well as, the factual? What will be their poetry, their magic?

And in deconstructing the insider/outsider opposition, let me recall that spectre of communism with which I began. Tim Rowse, quite rightly warns against 'city' outsiders, who are too quick to condemn exploitation on the stations, armed as they are with a Marxist theory insensitive to the more 'human' relations of affection on the Durack stations which enabled survival and cultural innovation for the station Aborigines, pretty much on their own terms, running the stations almost as much as they were run by them. Now what is curious is that Swain's book concludes with another infiltration of that Marxist philosophy, but one which works its way up from the Pilbara, becomes known as Don McLeod law, infiltrates ceremonies like *Djuluru*, and perhaps culminates at Wave Hill with the revival of the lands rights campaigns. This is the law of the 'fair go', of the historical, future-oriented promise of equality and moral rights. Was it Boxer, perhaps the first Aboriginal modernist, who paved the way along this frontier for the passage of these ideas?

<sup>32</sup> Mandi, in Shaw, *Countrymen*, p. 39.

<sup>33</sup> Durack, *Sons in the Saddle*, pp. 158–66.

<sup>34</sup> Shaw, *Countrymen*, p. 183.

<sup>35</sup> Rowse, 'Were You ever Savages?' p. 93.

<sup>36</sup> Bulla, in Shaw, *Countrymen*, p. 80.

How can it be, that communism, now dead as a social system (capitalism is triumphant on the world stage) came both inappropriately from the city as European theory, and from the bush as insider knowledge, to produce, in conjunction with local cultures which I have been unable to expand upon, a radical transformative cult which still lives in the name of Boxer. Boxer's story has the power that is often attributed to European theories, stories with the power to change our understandings of things. Boxer is dead, we are pretty sure<sup>37</sup> (maybe we should check that grave again), but as the Algerian-French philosopher says 'the dead can often be more powerful than the living.'<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Deborah Bird Rose says that Boxer may not have been born, a story she has from the Yaralin says that he came out of a hole in the Pinkerton Ranges. Personal communication.

<sup>38</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 48.

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